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(54) **TOY PLAYSET WITH A LAUNCHER AND A MATERIAL DISPENSER**

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A63H 18/16 (2006.01)

(52) **U.S. Cl.**
USPC **446/444**; 446/14

(58) **Field of Classification Search**
USPC 446/174, 433, 444, 465, 475, 166, 267, 446/429, 483
See application file for complete search history.

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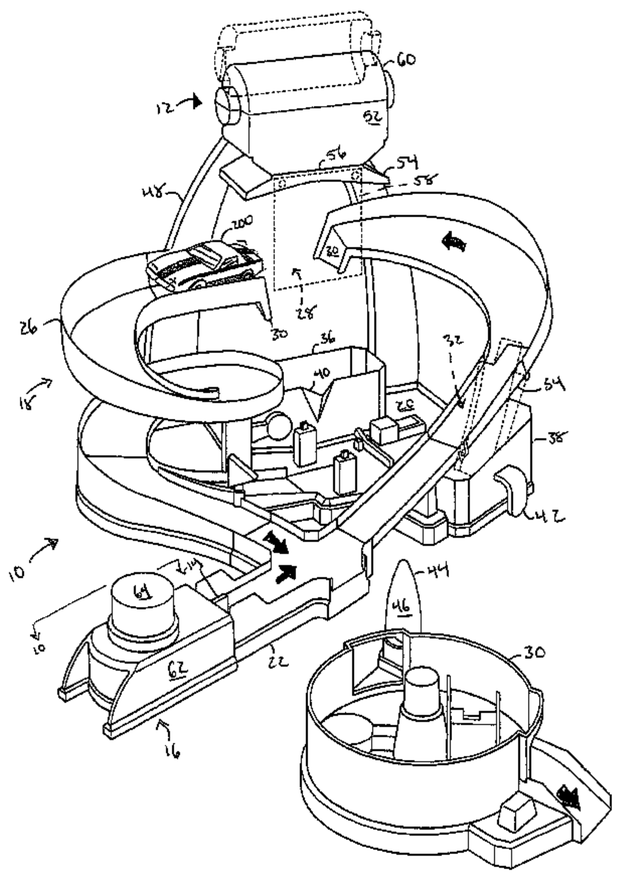
(57) **ABSTRACT**

In some examples, a toy vehicle playset for a toy vehicle is provided with a track assembly including a vehicle launcher operatively connected to a track. The track defines a travel path, and there is a dispensing assembly including a release mechanism positioned adjacent a portion of the track. A trigger assembly is operably connected to the vehicle launcher and the release mechanism so that activation of the trigger assembly may simultaneously activate the vehicle launcher and the release mechanism.

17 Claims, 4 Drawing Sheets



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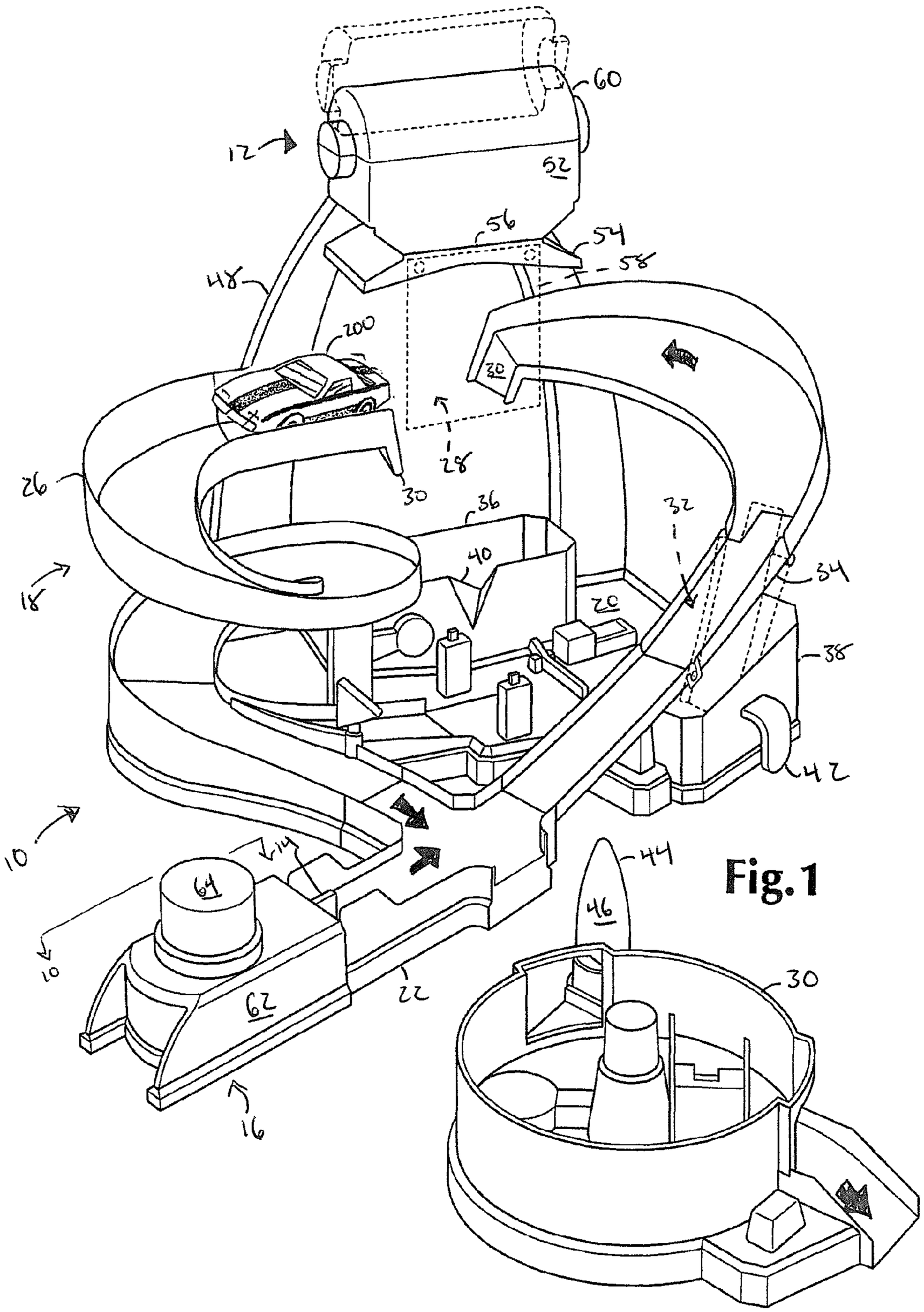
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12
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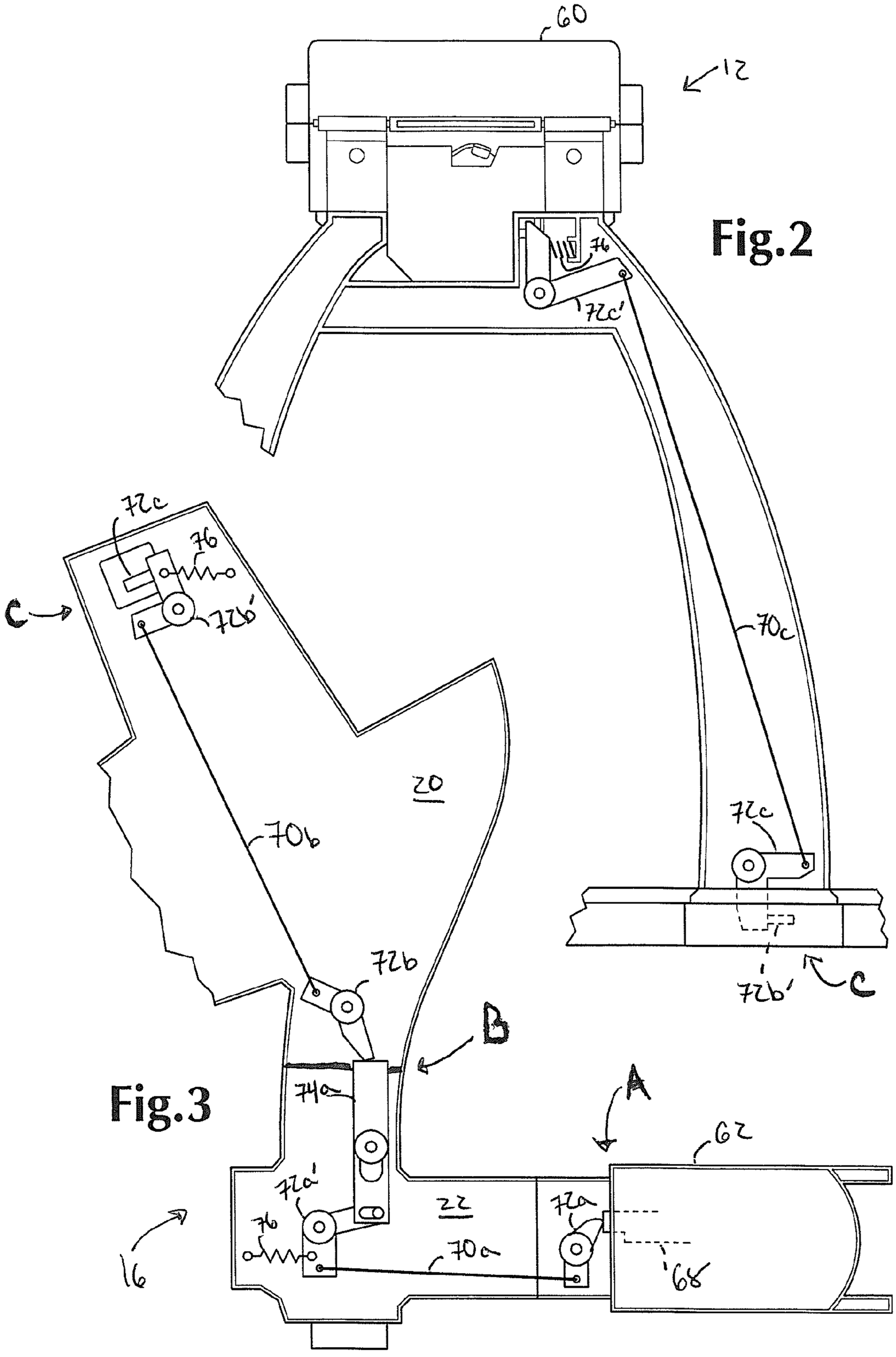
Fig. 1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72c'
72c
76
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22
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16

Fig.2

Fig.3

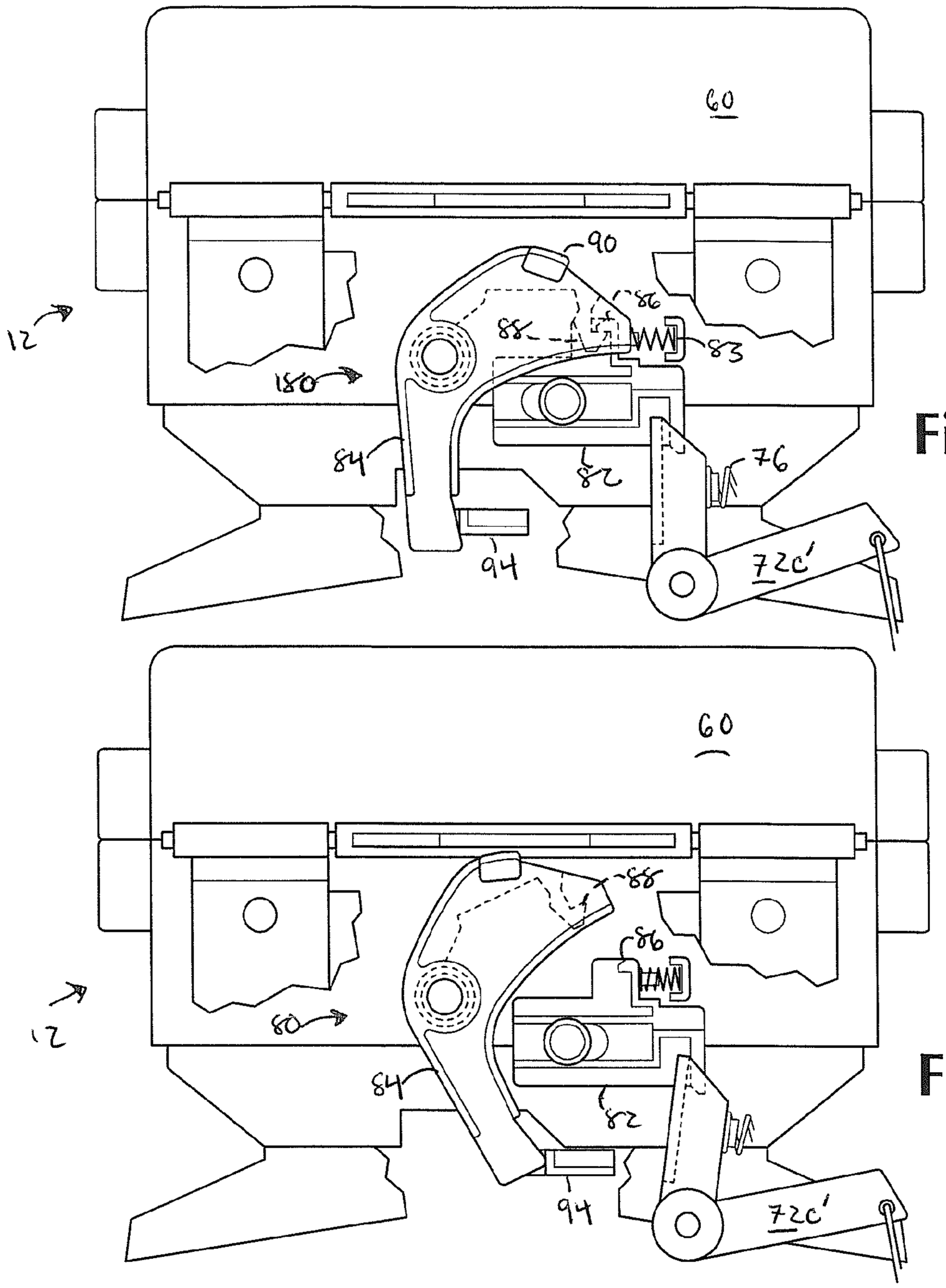

Fig.4

Fig.5

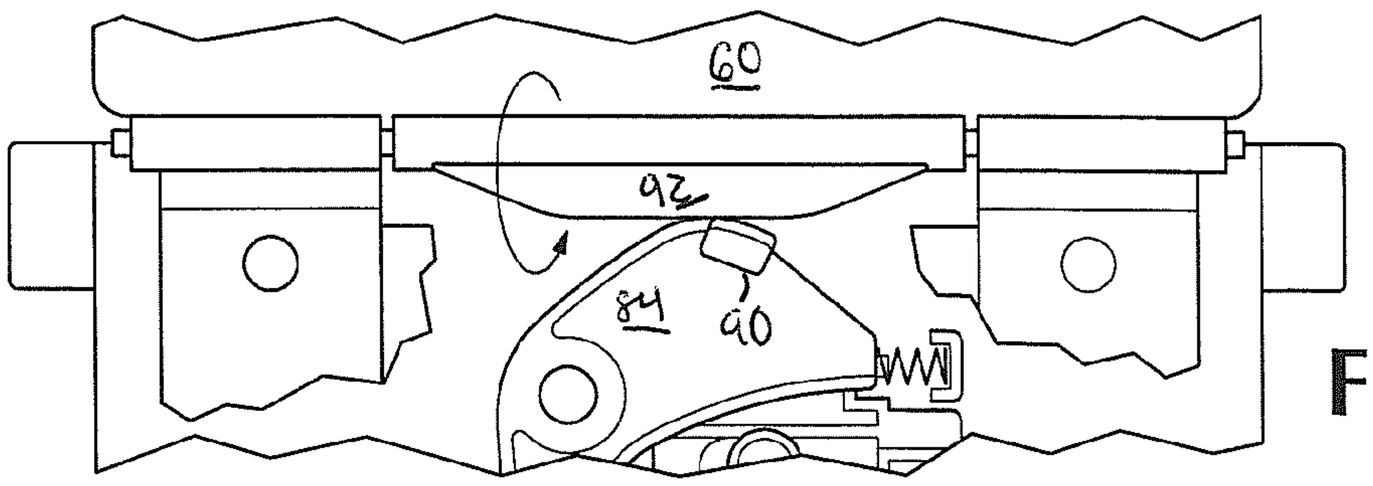

Fig.6

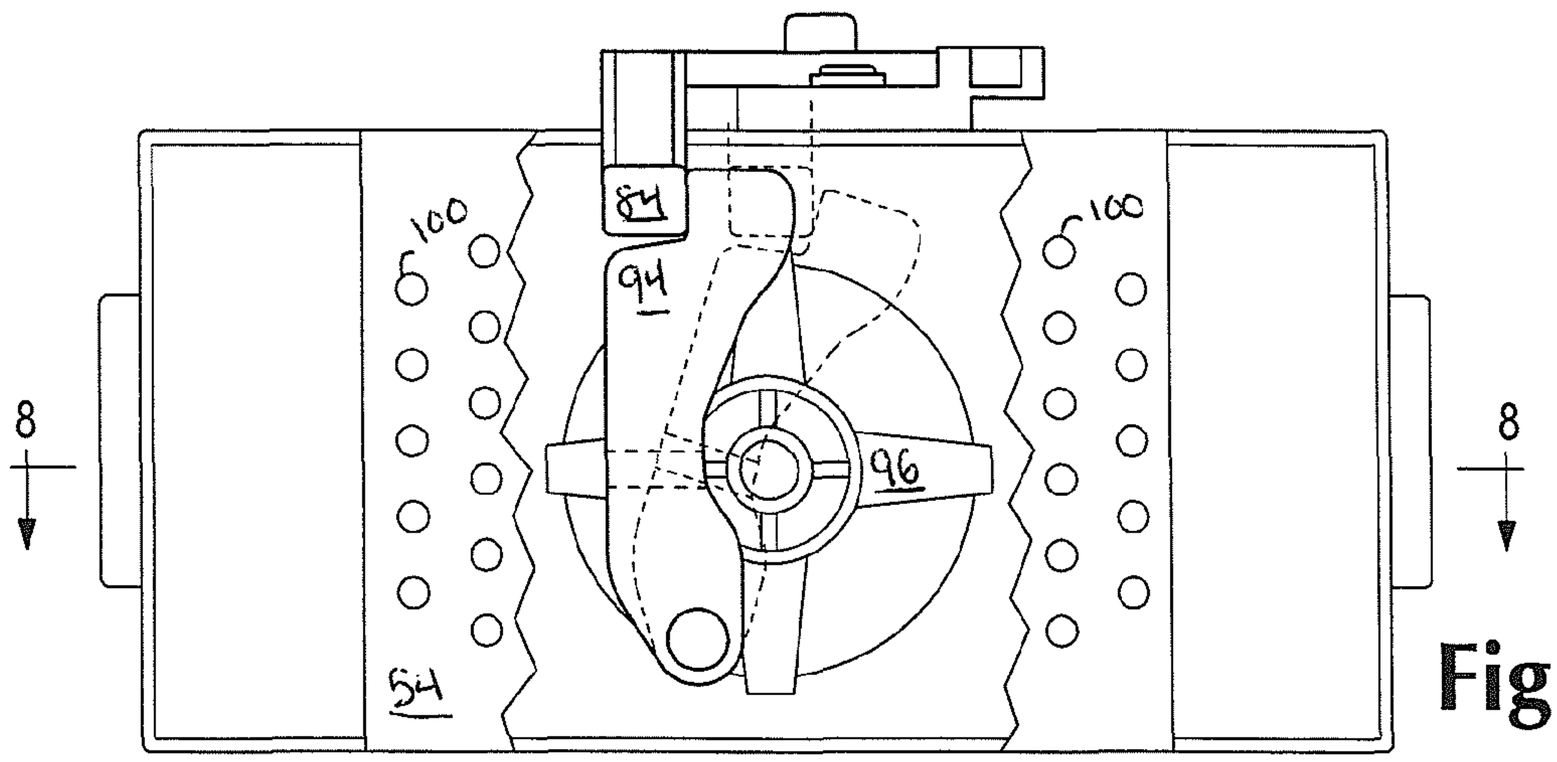

Fig.7

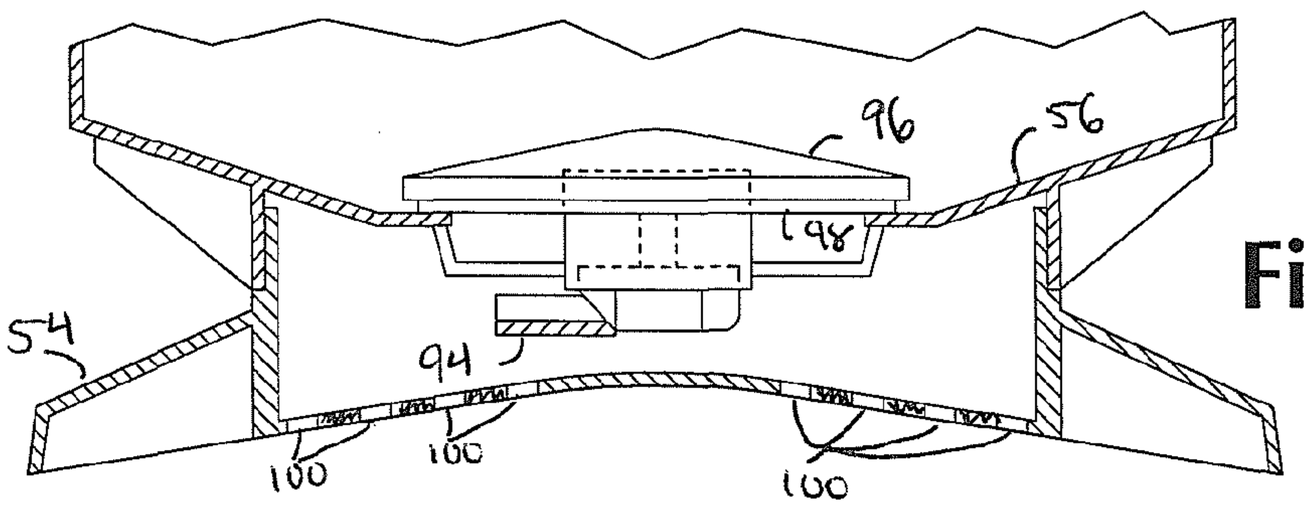

Fig.8

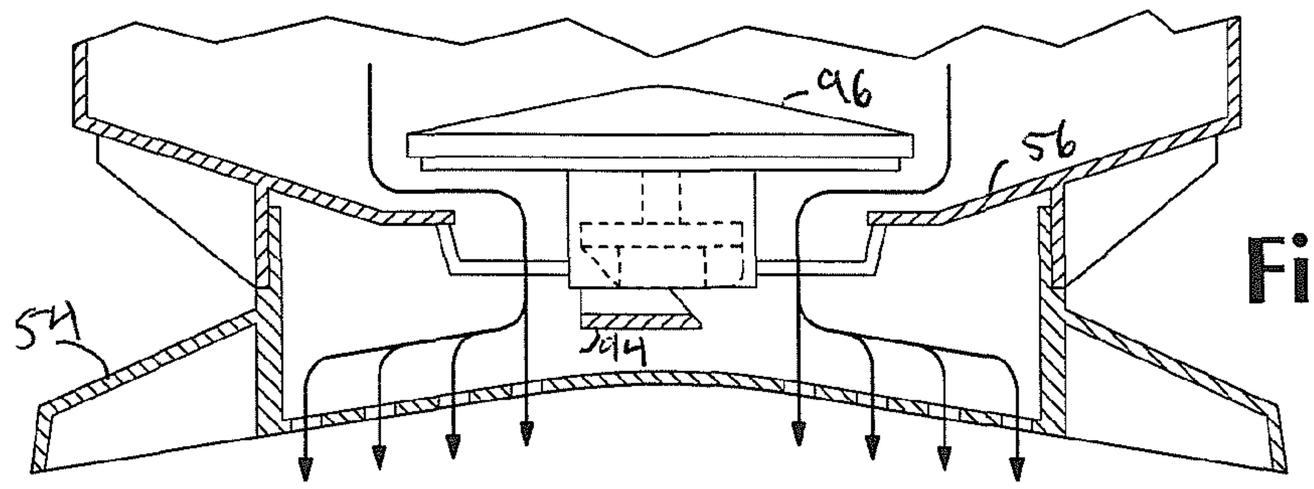

Fig.9

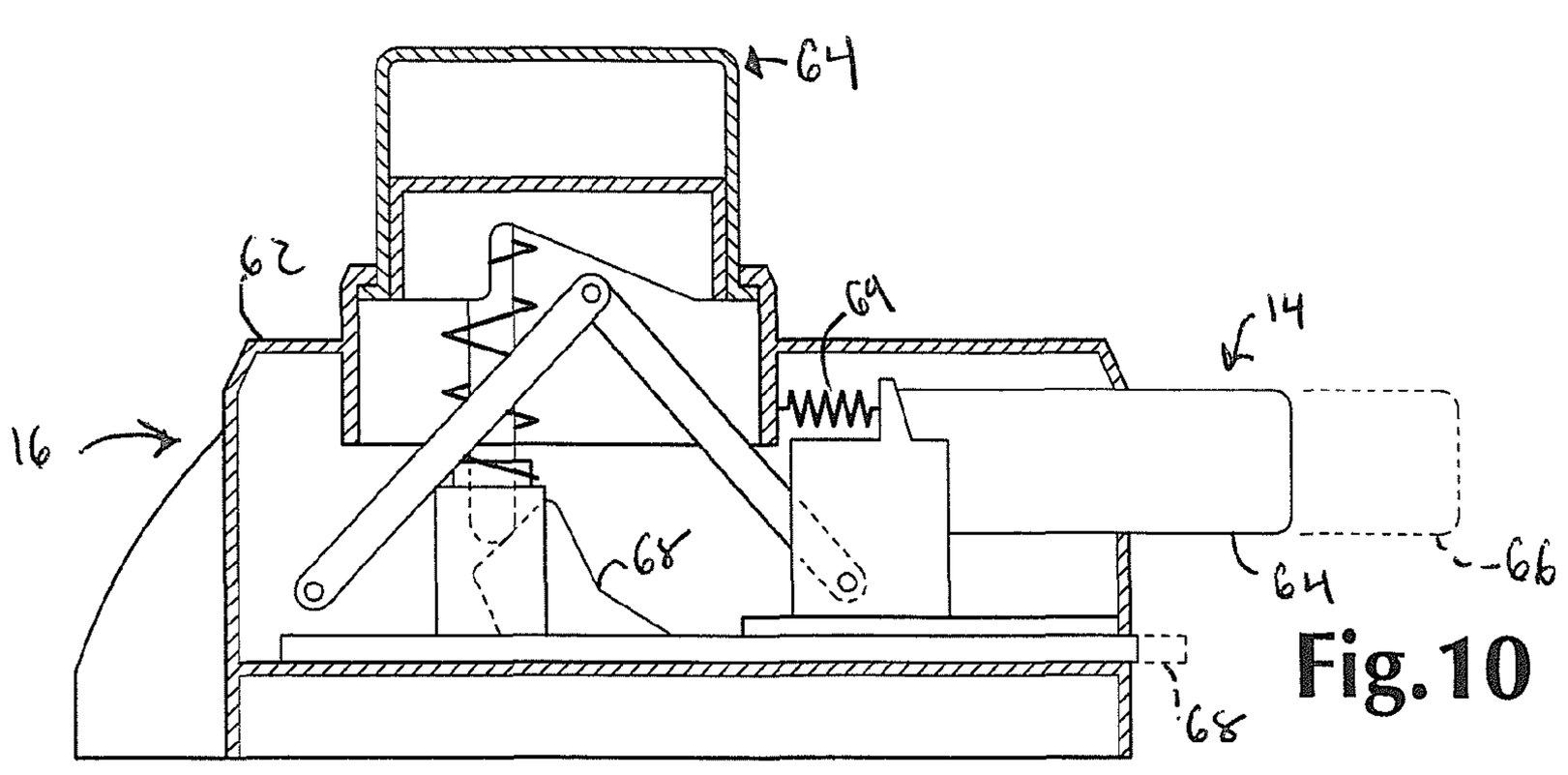

Fig.10

TOY PLAYSET WITH A LAUNCHER AND A MATERIAL DISPENSER

RELATED APPLICATION(S)

This application claims priority under 35 U.S.C. §119(e) to U.S. Provisional Patent Application Ser. No. 61/172,581, which was filed on Apr. 24, 2009 and is entitled "TOY TRACK SET WITH A WATER TANK". The complete disclosure of the above-identified patent application is hereby incorporated by reference for all purposes.

BACKGROUND

Toy playsets and accompanying toys are a source of entertainment for children. Toy playsets having different features may increase the enjoyment of children using the playsets. For example, the toy playset may include a launcher and a dispenser for dispensing a fluid material on the playset. Additionally and/or alternatively, the toy playset may feature a toy vehicle track set. Some toy playsets may be configured for use with a thermochromatic toy that changes color upon exposure to hot or cold material.

The present disclosure is directed generally to toy playsets and, more particularly, to playsets with a launcher and one or more with one or more dispensers for a fluid material, such as water, configured for release on a toy and/or toy track set. Examples of track sets and/or toys are disclosed in U.S. Pat. Nos. 4,045,908; 4,356,657; 4,519,789; 4,725,462; 4,818,215; 4,917,643; 4,961,716; 5,011,445; 5,085,607; 5,202,677; 5,223,958; 5,282,651; 5,316,513; 5,375,271; 5,389,093; 5,482,373; 5,502,967; 5,503,583; 5,586,923; 5,643,040; 5,716,253; 5,743,185; 5,786,838; 5,871,385; 5,899,789; 6,196,241; 6,241,573; 6,312,311; 6,322,416; 6,346,024; 6,450,277; 6,468,088; 6,478,654; 6,585,555; 6,663,464; 6,676,480; 6,780,127; 6,951,497; 6,986,719; 7,070,518; 7,189,133; 7,258,073; 7,278,369; U.S. Patent Application Nos. U.S. 20030087580; U.S. 20040004069; U.S. 20050178314; U.S. 20070128969; U.S. 20070259593; U.S. 20080009224; U.S. 20080070474; and Foreign Patent Nos. ES2015663; GB2092463; GB2205255; GB2292323; GB2310283; GB2315685; GB2367479; JP07223397; JP11315277; JP2001149666; JP0007223397; JP2008264113; W089084861. The disclosures of all the above-referenced patents are incorporated herein by reference in their entirety for all purposes.

SUMMARY

In some examples, a toy vehicle playset for a toy vehicle is provided, comprising a track assembly including a vehicle launcher operatively connected to a track defining a travel path, a dispensing assembly including a release mechanism positioned adjacent a portion of the track and a trigger assembly operably connected to the vehicle launcher and the release mechanism. Activation of the trigger assembly may simultaneously activate the vehicle launcher and the release mechanism.

In some examples, a toy playset for a thermochromatic toy is provided, comprising a toy launcher configured to launch a thermochromatic toy along a travel path, a dispenser adjacent the travel path configured to releasably retain color changing material, and a trigger operably connected to the toy launcher and the dispenser. Activation of the trigger may simultaneously launch the thermochromatic toy along the travel path and release the color changing material from the dispenser into the travel path.

In some examples, a toy vehicle playset for a toy vehicle is provided, comprising a track assembly including a vehicle launcher activatable to launch a toy vehicle. The launcher may be attached to a track defining a travel path for a toy vehicle. The toy vehicle playset may further comprise a water dispenser including a tank and a support assembly for supporting the tank above the track. The tank may have a moveable release member at a bottom portion of the tank. The vehicle launcher and the moveable release member may be configured to be activated simultaneously.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. **1** is a perspective view of a nonexclusive illustrative example of a playset in accordance with the present disclosure.

FIG. **2** is a partial rear view of the playset of FIG. **1**, showing a portion of a trigger assembly in accordance with the present disclosure.

FIG. **3** is a partial underside view of the playset of FIG. **1**, showing a portion of a trigger assembly in accordance with the present disclosure.

FIG. **4** is a rear view of a dispensing assembly in accordance with the present disclosure, showing a portion of a release mechanism in a closed position.

FIG. **5** is a rear view of the dispensing assembly of FIG. **4**, showing a portion of the release mechanism in an open position.

FIG. **6** is a partial view of the dispensing assembly of FIG. **4**, showing compression of a lid against a portion of the release mechanism.

FIG. **7** is an underside view of the dispensing assembly of FIG. **4**, showing a portion of the release mechanism and a portion of a cascade member.

FIG. **8** is a section view of the dispensing assembly of FIG. **4**, taken generally along line **8-8** in FIG. **7**, showing a portion of the release mechanism and a release member in a closed position.

FIG. **9** a section view of the dispensing assembly of FIG. **4**, taken generally along line **8-8** in FIG. **7**, showing a portion of the release mechanism and a release member in an open position.

FIG. **10** is a section view of a portion of the trigger assembly and a launcher of FIG. **1**, taken generally along line **10-10** in FIG. **1**, showing the ready-to launch position and the launched position.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

FIG. **1** sets forth a perspective view of a toy playset constructed in accordance with the present invention and generally referenced by numeral **10**. Playset **10** includes a dispenser assembly **12** and a launcher **14**, also referred to as a vehicle launcher. Playset **10** further includes a trigger assembly **16** operably connected to launcher **14** and dispenser assembly **12**, wherein activation of trigger assembly **16** simultaneously activates launcher **14** and dispenser assembly **12**.

A particularly fun play pattern using playset **10** includes a thermochromic toy that changes color as it flies through hot or cold fluid material released from dispenser assembly **12**, such as hot or cold water or other color changing material. By decorating one or more surface areas on the toy with thermochromic ink, also known as thermochromatic ink, such as inks made by Pilot Ink in Japan, a near instantaneous and quite magical color change may be created as the toy flies through the water, even if the toy is moving very fast. Triggering the

start of the water release to match the launch of the toy insures that ample water is available at the time the toy is most likely to be travelling through the released water.

The embodiment of the playset shown in FIGS. **1-10** is configured for use with a toy vehicle **200** and includes a track assembly **18**, supported on a base **20**, however, other embodiments in accordance with the present disclosure may be configured for use without a track assembly and/or with other toys including such nonlimiting examples as toy balls, toy airplanes, action figures, and dolls.

As best seen in FIG. **1**, track assembly **18** may include a track segment **22** adjacent launcher **14**. A first track loop segment **24** may be coupled at one end to track segment **22** and may form a partial loop extending upwardly into alignment with a second track loop segment **26** on the opposite side of a first opening **28** in track assembly **18**. First opening **28** may be further defined by downwardly extending splash guards **30**. Second track loop segment **26** may define a complete and/or partial loop and may be coupled at one end to track segment **22**.

Some embodiments of playset **10** may further include a toy vehicle catcher, such as spin dry assembly **30**. The spin dry assembly **30** may be operable to receive toy vehicle **200** and retain it while it is spun dry. When spinning is completed, the spin dry assembly **30** may be operable to position toy vehicle **200** for discharge from playset **10**. Toy vehicle catcher **100** is shown spaced from track segment **22** in FIG. **1**, however, it may be configured for attachment to track segment **22** using a tab that mates with a corresponding slot, as is known in the art.

Track assembly **18** may further include a second opening **32** approximately sized such that toy vehicle **200** can pass through. A trapdoor **34** may be hingedly attached to the track assembly **18** and may be movable between a closed position in which trapdoor **34** is positioned in the second opening and aligned with and forms a part of track assembly **18**, and an open position (shown in dashed lines in FIG. **1**) in which trapdoor **34** is removed from second opening **32**. Trapdoor **34** may be approximately the size of second opening **32** to support toy vehicle **200** when trapdoor **34** is in the closed position.

Playset **10** may include a first reservoir **36** positioned below first opening **28** and/or a second reservoir **38** positioned below second opening **32**. First and second reservoir **36**, **38** may be detachable from playset **10** and may be used to fill dispenser assembly **12** and/or hold fluid material. For example, first and/or second reservoir **36**, **38** may include a curved lip portion **40** and/or a handle **42** to facilitate pouring water.

Playset **10** may further include accessories for use with playset **10**. For example, playset **10** may include a pen **44** having an elongated chamber **46** configured to hold water, a valve and a foam tip, such that a user can fill pen **44** with water and squeeze to decorate toy vehicle **200**. Toy vehicle catcher **30** may define one or more tool receptacles which receive and support a plurality of alternative tools, such as pen **44**, for convenient access and storage.

Dispenser assembly **12** may be supported above first opening **28** in track assembly **18** by a first support member **48** and a second support member **50** and may be configured to releasably support quantities of material capable of fluid motion, including, but not limited to, water, compressed air, confetti, and/or glitter into the travel path of a launched toy and/or track assembly **18**. Accordingly, dispenser assembly **12** may be distal launcher **14** and adjacent a portion of the travel path of the launched toy vehicle and/or track assembly **18**.

Dispenser assembly **12** may include a dispenser **52**, also referred to as a tank or a hopper. A cascade member **54** may be joined to a lower portion **56** of dispenser **52**. Dispenser assembly **12** may further include a splash guard **58** adjacent dispenser **52** to minimize dispersement of fluid material around playset **10**. A lid **60** may be hingedly joined to dispenser **52** having an open position (shown in relief in FIG. **1**) and a closed position. Dispenser assembly **12** may include a release mechanism discussed in further detail with respect to FIGS. **4-9**.

Turning now to FIGS. **1-3** and **10**, as explained earlier, trigger assembly **16** may be operably connected to both launcher **14** and dispenser assembly **12**. Trigger assembly **16** may extend from launcher **14** to dispenser assembly **12** through a housing **62**, a portion of track assembly **18**, such as track segment **22**, base **20** and/or first support member **48**. A user activatable button **64** or trigger may be adjacent launcher **14** and distal dispenser assembly **12**. Activation of trigger **64** may activate launcher **14** and dispenser assembly **12**.

As best seen in FIG. **10**, launcher **14** may be partially supported within housing **62** and may have a ready-to-be launched position **64** and a launched position **66**. Trigger assembly **16** may be operably connected to launcher **14** via one or more biased housing trigger members, wherein activation or compression of trigger **64** causes the one or more biased housing trigger members to laterally move launcher **14** from ready-to-be launched position **64** to launched position **66**. For example, launcher **14** may be at least partially supported by a housing trigger platform **68** and compression of trigger **64** may cause housing trigger platform **68** and launcher **14** to move laterally. Housing trigger platform **68** may be biased via one or more biasing member, such as a spring **69**.

Turning now to FIGS. **2** and **3**, one or more of housing trigger members, such as housing trigger platform **68**, may be operably connected to a moveable series of trigger assembly members supported within track segment **22**, base **20** and first support member **48**. For example, trigger assembly members may include trigger rods **70**, pivotable trigger arms **72** and/or laterally moveable trigger elements **74**, one or all of which may be biased by one or more biasing members **76**. The combination of one pivotable trigger arm **72**, one laterally moveable trigger element **74**, and one biasing member **76** is particularly useful for playsets that may be assembled and disassembled, because pivotable trigger arm **72** and biasing member **76** may be contained in a first housing, and laterally moveable trigger element **74** may be contained in an adjacent second housing that is removably attached to the first housing. Similar motion-transfer mechanisms may include a first pivotable trigger arm **72** be contained in a first housing, and a second pivotable trigger arm **72** be contained in an adjacent second housing that is removably attached to the first housing.

For example, housing trigger platform **68** may operably connect to a track trigger arm **72***a* across point A between housing **62** and track segment **22**. Track trigger arm **72***a* may be operably connected to a track trigger element **72***a* via a track trigger rod **70***a* and a second track trigger arm **72***a*', all contained within track segment **22**.

Laterally moveable track trigger element **72***a* may operably connect to a base trigger arm **72***b* across point B between track segment **22** and base **20**. Base trigger arm **72***b* may be operably connected to a second base trigger arm **72***b*' via a base trigger rod **70***b*.

Second base trigger arm **72***b*' may operably connect to a support trigger arm **72***c* across point C between base **20** and

support member **48**. Support trigger arm **72***c* may be operably connected to a second support trigger arm **72***c*' via a support trigger rod **70***c*.

Turning now to FIGS. **4-9**, trigger assembly **16** may be operably connected to dispenser assembly **12** having a release mechanism **80**, such that activation of trigger assembly **16** causes activation of release mechanism **80**. Release mechanism **80** may include a release member or stopper **96** at the bottom portion **56** of dispenser **52**, wherein movement of stopper **96** releases any fluid material content in dispenser **52**.

For example, a pivotable trigger arm **72**, such as second support trigger arm **72***c*' may be in operable contact with a laterally moveable release element **82**. Release element **82** may be biased by biasing member **83** and may releasably engage or lock with a first pivotable release arm **84** via hooks **86** and **88** (FIG. **4**). Movement of pivotable second support trigger arm **72***c*' may cause dis-engagement of release element **82** and first pivotable release arm **84** (FIG. **5**). Compression of a top portion **90** of first pivotable release arm **84** by a lid extension **92** may releasably re-engage or re-lock release element **82** with a first pivotable release arm **84** via hooks **86** and **88** (FIG. **6**). This makes it easy for a child to reset release mechanism **80**, because it is as simple as lifting and/or closing a lid on a container.

First pivotable release arm **84** may be in operable contact with a second pivotable release arm **94**. Pivotable movement of second pivotable release arm **94** may impact against stopper **96** and may force stopper **96** from a closed position wherein fluid material can not escape dispenser **52** (FIG. **8**) to an open position wherein fluid material (shown as arrows) is released from dispenser **52** (FIG. **9**). Stopper **96** may include a rubber ring **98** to aid in forming a sealed closure in the closed position.

Cascade member **54** disposed below moveable stopper **96** may include perforations **100** in one or more areas such that fluid material released from dispenser **52** is falls through perforations **100**. The number and size of the perforations **100** may be configured to prolong the release of water from dispenser **52**, ensuring that some water may fall on a launched or moving toy vehicle despite distance from launcher **14**. The cascade member **54** and/or perforations **100** may be configured such that water falling from tank **14** has a twin waterfall effect (FIG. **9**).

As explained above, a particularly fun play pattern using playset **10** may include a thermochromic toy vehicle that changes color. For example, a user may decorate toy vehicle **200** with pen **44** to change selected portions of a thermochromic coating, and then launch the decorated vehicle under the water fall to change the colors of the vehicle yet again.

One or more elements of playset **10** may represent a human-like character, licensed character, copyrighted character, or any other suitable fantasy or real-life character or may represent a real-life or fantasy theme. For example, playset **10** may be configured to represent a garage wherein a user may rinse toy vehicle **200** or customize the color of toy vehicle **200** including hydro-chromatic or thermo-chromatic paint.

The various components of playset **10** may be fabricated from any suitable material, such as plastic, foamed plastic, flexible plastic, one or more layers of fabric, wood, cardboard, pressed paper, metal, or any combination of materials. A suitable material or combination of materials may be selected to provide a desirable synergy of weight, strength, durability, cost, and/or manufacturability. Several aspects of this exemplary method of game play may be modified from that disclosed above. Play may thus be configured to provide a game with a desired degree of complexity or difficulty, for example to adapt the game to players of a predetermined age range.

It is believed that the disclosure set forth above encompasses multiple distinct inventions with independent utility. While an example of each of these inventions has been disclosed in a preferred form, the specific examples thereof as disclosed and illustrated herein are not to be considered in a limiting sense as numerous variations are possible. The subject matter of the disclosures includes all novel and non-obvious combinations and subcombinations of the various elements, features, functions and/or properties disclosed herein. Similarly, where "a" or "a first" element or the equivalent thereof is recited, such usage should be understood to include incorporation of one or more such elements, neither requiring nor excluding two or more such elements.

Inventions embodied in various combinations and subcombinations of features, functions, elements, and/or properties may be claimed through presentation of claims in a related application. Such claims, whether they are directed to different inventions or directed to the same invention, whether different, broader, narrower or equal in scope to the other claims, are also regarded as included within the subject matter of the present disclosure.

We claim:

1. A toy vehicle playset for a toy vehicle comprising:

a track assembly including a vehicle launcher operatively connected to a track defining a travel path;

a dispensing assembly configured to releasably retain a dispensable material, including a release mechanism positioned adjacent a portion of the track remote from the vehicle launcher; and

a trigger assembly operably connected to the vehicle launcher and the release mechanism via one or more biased trigger members, wherein activation of the trigger assembly simultaneously activates the vehicle launcher and the dispensable material release mechanism;

wherein the track assembly is configured so that the simultaneous activation of the vehicle launcher and the release mechanism results in an interaction between a launched vehicle and a dispensed material at the remote portion of the track.

2. The toy vehicle playset of claim **1**, wherein the release mechanism includes a moveable release member having an open position and activation of the trigger assembly simultaneously launches the toy vehicle and moves the moveable release member to the open position.

3. The toy vehicle playset of claim **2**, wherein the trigger assembly includes a manually operable trigger adjacent the vehicle launcher and distal the moveable release member.

4. The toy vehicle playset of claim **2**, wherein the dispensing assembly includes a tank and a support assembly for supporting the tank above the remote portion of the track, the tank having a bottom portion including the moveable release member.

5. The toy vehicle playset of claim **4**, wherein the dispensing assembly includes a cascade member on the underside of the tank bottom portion, the cascade member configured to distribute the dispensed material released from the tank.

6. A toy playset for a thermochromatic toy comprising:

a toy launcher configured to launch a thermochromatic toy along a travel path;

a dispenser adjacent the travel path configured to releasably retain a color changing material; and

a trigger operably connected to the toy launcher and the dispenser via one or more biased trigger members,

wherein activation of the trigger simultaneously launches the thermochromatic toy along the travel path and releases the color changing material from the dispenser into the travel path, so that the thermochromatic toy and the color changing material interact along the travel path.

7. The toy vehicle playset of claim **6**, wherein the dispenser is configured to releasably retain water.

8. The toy vehicle playset of claim **6**, wherein the dispenser includes a tank and a support assembly for supporting the tank above the travel path.

9. The toy vehicle playset of claim **6**, wherein the trigger is adjacent the toy launcher and distal the dispenser.

10. A toy vehicle playset for a toy vehicle comprising:

a track assembly including a vehicle launcher activatable to launch a toy vehicle, attached to a track defining a travel path for a toy vehicle;

a water dispenser assembly including a tank and a support assembly for supporting the tank above the track, the tank having a moveable release member at a bottom portion of the tank configured to release water; and

a trigger assembly operably connected to the vehicle launcher and the moveable release member by at least one biased trigger member, wherein activation of the trigger assembly launches the toy vehicle and moves the moveable release member to an open position;

wherein the vehicle launcher and the moveable release member are configured to be activated simultaneously, and the track assembly is configured so that the simultaneous activation of the vehicle launcher and the moveable release member results in an interaction between the launched vehicle and the released water at a point along the track remote from the vehicle launcher.

11. The toy vehicle playset of claim **10**, wherein the dispensing assembly includes a cascade member on the underside of the tank bottom portion, the cascade member configured to distribute water released from the tank.

12. The toy vehicle playset of claim **10**, wherein the track is elevated above a work surface and the tank is supported above a first opening in the track.

13. The toy vehicle playset of claim **12**, wherein the dispenser assembly includes a removable first reservoir positionable under the first opening in the track.

14. The toy vehicle playset of claim **13**, wherein the removable first reservoir includes a handle and a curved lip portion configured for pouring water.

15. The toy vehicle playset of claim **12**, wherein the track includes a second opening, the second opening sized such that the vehicle can pass through and a trapdoor movable between a closed position in which the trapdoor is positioned in the second opening and aligned with and forms a part of the track and an open position in which the trapdoor is removed from the second opening, the trapdoor being sized to support the toy vehicle when the trapdoor is in the closed position.

16. The play set of claim **15**, further comprising a second reservoir disposed below the trapdoor for receiving a vehicle passing through the second opening when the trapdoor is in the open position.

17. The toy vehicle playset of claim **12**, wherein the first opening in the track includes a splash guard.

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